

Community resources

[Follow us on Twitter](#) [Check our Reddit](#) [Twitter this](#) [Digg this](#) [page](#) [Contact us on IRC](#)

courage is contagious

Viewing cable 05ATHENS2529, COMBATING EXTREMISM IN GREECE

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#05ATHENS2529**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05ATHENS2529	2005-09-27 13:53	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

[www.tanea.gr](#)

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ATHENS 002529

SIPDIS

FOR P, R AND EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#) [GR](#) [INTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM IN GREECE

REF: STATE 159129

Classified By: Charge Tom Countryman. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

1. (S) SUMMARY: In Greece, the twin threats of extremism and violence stem more from a decades-old, homegrown anti-U.S., anti-NATO, anti-globalization sentiment that is deeply engrained in Greek society than from extremism exported from the Middle East. Domestic terrorist groups and an active anarchist movement have long been the source of extremism and violence in Greece. Greece's Muslim community is split between the Turkish minority in the north (protected under the Treaty of Lausanne), and a relatively new Athens-based population of economic migrants from the Middle East and South Asia. Extremist elements are rare in both. Greek society's insular focus, with its high premium on "Greekness" and the Orthodox religion, has created a haven for fringe groups which target non-Greeks (especially Jews) for violence. Above all, the United States is Public Enemy Number One in Greece -- domestic extremist groups regularly target the U.S. embassy to protest against both past history and current "American hegemony." To counter extremist attitudes, the Embassy has a multifaceted outreach program, designed to promote mutual understanding (an MPP goal) between the U.S. and Greece, and within Greece's increasingly heterogeneous population. END SUMMARY.

FORMS OF EXTREMISM IN GREECE

12. (S) Extremism in Greece is mostly homegrown, and to a great extent derives from events unique to Greeks. In 1968 a military junta overthrew the Greek Government in a move that is still widely (if wrongly) held here to have been at the behest, or with the connivance, of the U.S. Government. The

Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus in 1974 is also chalked up to American hegemonist planning. Since then, a perceived bias in U.S. policy toward Turkey (and Greece's own identity problems vis-a-vis 400 years of Ottoman rule) has further skewed public opinion against the United States. In recent history, the Kosovo air campaign and Operation Iraqi Freedom have both been used to keep public hostility toward the U.S. at a peak.

-- DOMESTIC TERRORISM: "17 November" (17N), a radical leftist group, was established in 1975 and named for the student uprising in Greece on 17 November 1973 against the ruling military junta. It is anti-Greek establishment, anti-U.S., anti-Turkey, and anti-NATO, and has sought the ouster of U.S. bases from Greece, the removal of Turkish military forces from Cyprus, and the severing of Greece's ties to NATO and the European Union. For 27 years, 17N murdered Greeks and non-Greeks alike, including five U.S. Embassy employees. Members of the organization also committed armed robbery, and carried out rocket attacks against symbolic targets. In 2002 a bungled attack by a 17N operative led to the arrests of eighteen other suspects. In 2004, fifteen of these 17N defendants were found guilty and given multiple life sentences. Some 17N members, including individuals believed to be involved in the murder of USG employees, remain at large; others have never been identified. Further, other domestic terrorist groups continue to operate in Greece, and while they have not attained the murderous notoriety of 17N, they serve as a beacon for the extremist segment of the Greek population. ELA (Revolutionary Popular Struggle) has described itself as revolutionary, leftist, anti-state, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism and strongly anti-U.S. ELA emerged in the 1970s and has assumed responsibility for over 200 bombing that killed three people. In the 90s, ELA stopped operations in Greece. Four members of ELA were arrested in 2004. All four were convicted and each received an imprisonment of 1,174 years. One member, Christos Tsigarides has since been released from prison for health reasons. In 2005 two other members were tried for ELA actions (both were acquitted).

Recently, two groups, "Revolutionary Action" and "Revolutionary Struggle" have appeared on the Greek domestic terrorism radar (it is unclear as yet whether these are, in fact, two separate groups). Some of Greece's CT elite believe that one group ("Revolutionary Action") is a successor to 17N. "Revolutionary Struggle" is considered to be the successor to ELA, having simply dropped the "Popular" from its title. "Revolutionary Struggle" has claimed responsibility for a number of small bombings at various Greek businesses, in which improvised explosive devices are always the weapon of choice. These attacks take place in the early morning hours and rarely cause injuries. There have been a few victims inadvertently injured as a result of being in the right place at the right time. This group usually warns the Hellenic Police prior to detonation, however faulty workmanship occasionally leads to premature explosions. "Revolutionary Action" has claimed responsibility for a number of more serious attacks directed solely at the Hellenic Police. In the fall of 2003, two devices exploded at a Greek Court in Athens, the second device clearly designed to harm first responders. In May 2004 three devices were exploded at a police precinct in Kallithea (Athens) and again the second/third devices seemed to be intended to cause harm to first responders. In October 2004 a roadside device was detonated as it was passed by a Hellenic Police bus convoy that was in route to Korydallos Prison, the current residence of incarcerated 17N members. There were no injuries, likely due to poor workmanship of the device. The most recent, and most disturbing, attack occurred on December 31, 2004, when a Special Police Guard, assigned to the residence of the British Military Attach was assassinated while sitting in his guard booth. Hellenic Police originally claimed that the attack was criminal in nature, but have subsequently attributed the attack to local terrorism. This case, as well as the others is still open and it appears that there are no suspects.

-- ANARCHISM: Anarchist organizations proliferate in Athens and Thessaloniki where they have carved out niches for themselves as extreme, leftist "irregulars." Greek anarchists organize regular demonstrations in the name of anti-globalization, and against the U.S. specifically and the more ambiguous "Western influence." For the most part, anarchist demonstrations are sparsely attended (although well-covered in the generally anti-American media). Gas-canister ("gazakia" in Greek) attacks have been orchestrated to destroy property, not people. Embassy has no evidence that anarchist groups receive material support and/or training from international terrorist groups. Like the domestic terror groups, however, anarchist gatherings serve to keep alive extremist views.

-- ANTI-SEMITISM: During World War II, 90 percent of Greece's Jewish population perished in camps. Today, only 5,000 Jews remain in Greece, mainly in Athens. While of a smaller scale

compared to other European countries, anti-Semitism is a recurring problem in Greece, expressed by acts of vandalism against Jewish monuments and buildings, insidious anti-Semitism in some media and through discrimination in the workplace. Some Greeks subscribe to the myth that no Jews were in the World Trade Center on September 11, or are convinced that the attacks were a plot of the CIA, the Mossad, or both. Greek newspapers, especially editorial cartoonists, are unforgiving in their use of Nazi imagery to describe Ariel Sharon and Israeli government policies in Gaza and the West Bank. At the same time, Greece has longstanding ties to the Palestinian cause and Arafat personally; Greece was the last member of the EU to establish diplomatic relations with Israel (1990). In modern colloquial Greek (as in the modern Arab world) there is often no distinction between "Jewish" and "Israeli." The problem is compounded by almost universal opposition to Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories.

13. (C) As an example of Greek extremist attitudes, the Popular Orthodox Herald Party (LAOS) promotes radical nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia. LAOS party leader George Karatzafaris, who won a seat in the European Parliament in 2004, regularly attributes negative events to international Jewish conspiracies and has used party-owned TV to denounce Greek politicians with Jewish origins and to claim that Jews were behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The Greek neo-Nazi group "Chryssi Avghi" (Golden Dawn), attempted to organize "Hatefest 2005" (one of the slogans for the event was "Turkey Out of Europe"), a pan-European "festival" for the Far Right in southern Greece. On a positive note, the event, after vigorous local opposition, was moved several times and ultimately out of Greece.

GREECE'S MUSLIM POPULATION

14. (C) Greece has a native Muslim minority of Turkish-speakers, anywhere from 90,000-140,000 strong who live in the northeastern province of Thrace and in the islands of the far eastern Aegean near Turkey. Under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, this Turcophone Muslim minority has official status; Islam is recognized and Muslims in Thrace have the right to maintain social and charitable organizations, to be educated in the Turkish-language and to settle family disputes under Shari'a law (Greece is the only country in Europe to do so). Officials say more than 300 mosques operate under Lausanne Treaty privileges. While Muslim clerics in Thrace have been trained in Saudi Arabia, and Turkish Consuls General in Thrace have a strong influence, bankrolling many local leaders and the "elected" muftis in the region, there is no indication of Muslim extremism among the indigenous minority in Thrace.

15. (C) Unlike in Thrace, the Muslim community in Athens has no treaty protection or guaranteed rights. In the last fifteen years, migration to Greece from Muslim countries has mushroomed -- activists believe there could be as many as 200,000 Muslim migrants (mainly illegals) in Athens, in addition to 4,000 Turcophone Greek Muslims. There is no official mosque in Athens, so Muslims pray in numerous unofficial prayer rooms. There are around two dozen such prayer rooms operating in Athens today. They are organized in basement apartments and generally serve discrete populations: Pakistani migrants go to a "Pakistani" mosque, Egyptians go to an "Egyptian" mosque, and so forth. Leaders of the Bangladeshi community have told us there is a limited amount of crossover in their worship. Although the Greek Parliament (finally) approved a bill in 2000 allowing construction of a mosque in Athens, the Archbishop of Greece has strongly protested that the cultural center would "serve as a breeding ground for terrorism."

U.S. EFFORTS TO COUNTER EXTREMISM

16. (C) Embassy has made good use of the IV program -- sending the only Muslim Member of Parliament on the "Young Muslim Leaders" International Visitor Program in FY 2005. We will send a Muslim woman from Thrace to the Young Muslim Leaders program in FY 2006.

17. (C) The Embassy (POL, RSO) monitors closely hate speech and activities through local contacts, police contacts, and the media. We monitor Islam-related incitement and hate speech through additional contact with muftis, imams, and members of Muslim minority in Thrace, as well as with the diverse and more transient immigrant Muslim population in Athens. There are no indications of incitement or hate speech directed against Muslims occurring in Athens.

18. (U) The Embassy has undertaken a series of outreach activities oriented at the Muslim population in Greece. We

opened an American Corner in Xanthi, a town in northeast Greece that is predominantly Muslim, and the IRC regularly sends material to Xanthi as part of the Embassy's country-wide outreach program. Ambassador hosts a yearly Iftar dinner. Ambassador and Embassy officers have spoken to student groups on U.S. policy in the Middle East, including students from Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries. Embassy and ConGen officers meet regularly with Muslim religious and community leaders in Thrace and Athens. Cultural program opportunities will be utilized in 2006.

19. (U) As noted, the Embassy sent Ilhan Ahmet, the one Muslim Member of the Greek Parliament, on an IV program this year. His website, www.ilhanahmet.com, is in Turkish and Greek. (NOTE: Greek usage of the world wide web is the lowest in the EU. END NOTE.) Building on Ahmet's IV program, we have helped develop a farming seminar to meet the needs of Muslim farmers in northern Greece.

GREEK EFFORTS TO COUNTER EXTREMISM

10. (S) The Greek Government's track record in countering extremism is uneven. 17N operated with impunity for 27 years, counting Greek police and government officials among its victims. The Olympic Games provided a much-needed incentive to bring Greek methods and operations into the 21st century. As a result, Greece now has more tools and know-how to keep track of extremist groups in Greek society. These skills, however, are perishable and require routine follow-up training. We do not believe such training has continued since the Olympics. Furthermore, we are skeptical as to whether or not the Hellenic Police are pursuing Islamic extremists in Greece with that same "pre-Olympic" vigor. Greek society also views enhanced police capabilities with a jaundiced eye. Greeks are hypersensitive to any perceived limits on personal freedoms; as an example, security cameras around town have been vandalized. Members of Parliament have also inveighed against their use; attempts to pass off the cameras as traffics have been only partly successful.

11. (C) Recently, the GoG appears to have taken a greater interest in moving against self-styled "anti-imperialist" anarchists who operate mainly in central Athens. In an August meeting, Public Order Minister Voulgarakis, responsible for police, promised to crack down on violent anarchist activity, telling the Ambassador that the July arrest of three anarchists had produced evidence that would result in convictions and more arrests in the future. Thessaloniki police have estimated there are 50-70 local anarchists who regularly incite violence. Recently, the Ministry of Public Order has called the Greek judiciary to task for a lack of prosecutions of the hundreds of anarchists arrested during the many destructive and violent demonstrations held in both Athens and Thessaloniki.

12. (C) The Government attempted to ignore "Hatefest 2005" until the outcry from Greek citizens became too loud. At that point, Greek Government Spokesman Roussopoulos stated that the GoG would take all measures to prevent the "Hatefest" gathering. Public Order Minister Voulgarakis seconded Roussopoulos' comments, saying the event was not welcome.

13. (C) The Government has taken steps to combat anti-Semitism, and has begun to press for membership on the International Task Force on Holocaust Education. However, it was in part the result of heavy Embassy pressure that Greece established January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2004. The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece constantly lobbies for moderation, tolerance, and freedom. The Greek Jewish community says the greatest problem faced by local Jews is the widespread perception that they are not truly "Greek." The Greek constitution enshrines Greek Orthodoxy as the official religion and the country's non-Orthodox minorities - Jews, Turcophone Muslims, Catholics, and other Christians - report difficulty advancing in careers in the military, education, and the public sector. It's not accurate to paint the Orthodox Church as anti-Semitic, but it is so virulently pro-Orthodox that the distinction is often lost.

14. (C) As is the norm in the EU, Greece has a modern education system that accepts pluralism and open intellectual exchange. Universities do, however, serve as recruiting centers (and worse) for anarchists. As a result of the 1973 student uprising against the military junta ruling Greece, Greece passed a law prohibiting police on university campuses. As recently as May 2005, anarchists took hostages at the Athens Polytechnic University and held them for more than eight hours as a protest against the presence on campus of armed bodyguards who had accompanied two Members of Parliament to the university for a book presentation (the 2 MPs, both former Cabinet Ministers, were among the hostages). Prior to the actual standoff, anarchists detected that police assigned to protect 2 MPs attending the event) were on

campus in violation of government regulations. The anarchists proceeded to attack the police and one policeman shot an attacker in the leg, in an effort to protect himself. The standoff ended peacefully, but the university academic board published a condemnation of the "police action" and called on Greeks to protest against the government. There was very little negative press that condemned the violence of the anarchists.

15. (U) As part of Greece's effort to join the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has requested Post's assistance in re-designing its curricula to update teaching of the Holocaust.

16. (U) Public (State) education is readily accessible, particularly for women and girls. Minority education is fully funded by the State, which funds madrassas where there are significant Muslim communities. In recent years, these madrassas have been opened to girls (who are required to wear headscarves).
COUNTRYMAN